

My Sheep Listen to My Voice
April 25, 2010
John 10:22 – 30

Listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

²²Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Dear Loving and Compassionate God, Giver of all gifts, we pray especially today for the mercy and love You give us. Open our hearts and minds to You. Give us the grace to accept your mercy. Help us to recognize your voice in all that we encounter, whether it be in the laughter of a child, the soft spoken word of a stranger, in the smiles on the faces of those around us or in the pain of those who are suffering. As we live each day, we pray for those less fortunate, especially those who are hurting, and whose wounds need to be healed.

Help us become involved in ways that show them how deeply we care. Give us the personal courage to listen to their concerns and help them find the solutions to which they are entitled as Your children; as our brothers and our sisters. In the words of my lips and in the meditations of hearts, speak to us today that we may hear your will and way for our lives. In Christ wonderful and Holy Name we pray, Amen.

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” I would imagine that these words spoken by the crowd to Jesus during the Feast of Dedication are all too familiar to many of us who sit here today. If you are God, then make your presence known plainly. If you are God, then heal my dying child. If you are God, then find me a job so that I can regain financial security. If you are God, then speak to me so that I may hear your voice and know that you are God.

Just as Christ reminds the crowd in our scripture reading today that they have failed to take responsibility for what they have seen and heard, so we too are reminded that it isn't that God hasn't spoken to us or that God hasn't been present in our lives, it is simply that we have not listened to what God has had to say and we have allowed our own desires to distract us from recognizing God's presence in our lives. *“I did tell you,”* said Jesus, *“but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. . .”* (John 10:25b – 27)

As I was driving to work this week I noticed a horse standing beneath a tree in a field. I remembered thinking to myself that the landscape was so beautiful and that the image of that horse beneath the tree would make an incredible photograph. And then I realized that I have passed by that same field every school day for the last year and a half. I've passed by that same field and that same tree approximately 200 times on my way to work, and I just noticed it for the first time this week. Why is that? Well, we get accustom to our routines and our surroundings. More plainly stated, we get accustom to our distractions. Our distractions become our focus and we fail to see the beauty of the creation all around us.

It is this same ability to distract us from seeing the world around us that also prevents us from hearing the voice of God or recognizing God's presence in our lives. The author of

Psalm 46:10 reminds us that the Lord commands each of us to, “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.” Be still? Are you crazy? I have too much to do! I have students to teach, bills to pay, a boss to please, a partner to keep happy, a family to provide for, a congregation to lead, my health to maintain and a dog to feed. If I slow down and get still, then I’m asleep! Wouldn’t it just be easier God if you made your presence and voice plainly known and help me to avoid an upset in my routine? Sounds simple, but it really doesn’t work that way, does it?

Now as Michael so quickly reminded me this week during Tuesday’s Together, we have a personal relationship with our Creator and our God. To be demanding of God is not unreasonable or unheard of, but what good is being demanding or asking a question if we are not going to take the time to listen for the response? It never ceases to amaze me in my classroom that a student will often times ask for a particular problem to be worked out or explained and almost immediately after I begin to give my response they either cut me off with, “Oh, never mind I see my mistake,” or they find themselves completely uninterested or distracted and miss the entire explanation. Aren’t we like that? How often have we asked God to guide us and lead us only to immediately turn around and begin once again to take the lead or to cut God off in the middle of God’s intervention? You cannot be lead, if you are not willing to follow and you cannot hear God’s voice if you are not willing to listen and to believe.

The author of Philippians has this advice to offer us. *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (4:4 – 7; NAS) Isn’t this exactly what

Reverend Todd had to say to us last week? Before we ever step into the river Jordan, before we ever walk out of our house in the morning or punch our timecard for another day of work, we should each praise God for the blessings God has in store for us! Equally so, know that God is offering unsurpassable love and peace for us in all that we do, particularly in God's presence in the now! Conversely, if we have already made our current reality a living hell by not including God in everything we do, then our future is only doomed to offer more of the same. If we don't experience that peace and love in the present then how is our future to be any different than it is right now. Our God and our Creator, the Great I AM is willing to heal our past, share in our present and shape our future; our responsibility in all of this is to give God all three; our past, our present and our future, by not only asking God the really hard questions and demanding God make his presence known in our lives, but also by being faithful to believe that God will provide for and speak to each of us. We must be willing to listen if we are going to hear what God has to say. (http://onefamilyoutreach.com/bible/John/jn_10_22-30.html)

Equally so we must be willing to listen to one another. Did you know that God has commanded that we provide for one another? We have declared ourselves to be a Community of Faith dedicated to loving and encouraging one another and almost weekly there is an ill word spoken about someone or a reaction that is offered in response to a question or concern that is given in without any thought to what role God is playing in any of it. Do we make mistakes? Absolutely! Do we ask for forgiveness? Absolutely! Are we forgiven? Absolutely! But if you cut off your nose to spite your face and repent of the action later isn't it quite plausible that you are still going to be without your nose!

One of my favorite stories from the bible involves the woman who has been brought into street before Jesus; accused of adultery. The men are once again testing Jesus love and

compassion and as we have come to expect from Jesus, his reply is not quite what they expected. Jesus says, “Ok, go ahead and stone her, but Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” Loosely translated into modern language he simply reminded them that we all have crap in our lives! Instead of seeking to tear down others you should be seeking to lift them up. Words are a powerful thing and so are our actions.

Jesus said, “My Father who has given my sheep to me is greater than all . . . no one can snatch them out of my hand.” You, each and everyone who has come this morning seeking a Word from God, those of you who have come seeking to hear God’s voice today cannot be forcibly taken out of the hand of God. If you can’t find hope and encouragement in that this morning, then I don’t know that you can be encouraged. I know that the imagery of sheep in one that is hard for us to hold onto. So let’s look at a different passage that tells us exactly who these sheep are that our Creator is so desperately holding onto.

Psalm 10:12 – 18 reads, “Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the *helpless*. Why does the wicked man insult God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The *victim* commits himself to you; you are the helper of the *fatherless*. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. The LORD is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the *afflicted*; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the *fatherless* and the *oppressed*, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. (NIV)

Look at the sheep that our Messiah will never let be taken from his hand: the helpless; those who have been victimized; the afflicted; the fatherless, that is, those who have been orphaned; and the oppressed, those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised by an

unforgiving, secular world. I would be hard pressed to say that there is anyone in this room this morning that hasn't fallen into one of these categories at some point during their life. Jesus affirms in our scripture reading today that we are his sheep and that we cannot be forcibly removed from his hand, that is, the hand of God; for Our Creator and our Christ are one. This message is the glorious news of salvation and it is offered and affirmed to each of us today.

As we stand to our feet and prepare ourselves for the sermon hymn, I encourage each of you to take some time today, this week and in all the days to come to find a quiet place where you can escape from the chaos of this world and listen for the voice of God in your life today. The altar of this sanctuary is always open, just as the arms of Christ are always open – ready to receive us and to assist us in healing our past, sharing our present and shaping our future. Won't you listen this morning for the voice of the one who is calling as we sing our sermon hymn today? Amen.